

# “Efficiency and Evangelism”: Peter Bryce and the Making of Liberal Protestantism at Toronto’s Earls court Methodist Church

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*This paper examines the work of Rev. Peter Bryce in establishing a progressive “institutional church” in Toronto’s Earls court district during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Ministering to a congregation largely made up of British immigrant working people, Bryce incorporated in his program the tenets of the church efficiency movement, which gained adherents in urban Canada in the prewar years. In order to better reach the urban working class, the movement advocated updated institutional arrangements and business-like clerical management. From this standpoint, Bryce’s broader objective at Earls court was to promote the “efficient” gendered functioning of the working-class family within the new industrial order and to encourage accommodation between labour and capital. Located firmly within liberal social Christianity, this approach reimagined the institutional role of the church in industrial life while advancing a moderate position on capitalist social relations.*

*L’article porte sur le travail du révérend Peter Bryce dans la mise sur pied d’une « Église institutionnelle » progressiste dans le district d’Earls court, à Toronto, dans les années 1900 et 1910. Desservant une congrégation surtout composée de travailleurs immigrants britanniques, Bryce incorporait dans son programme les principes du mouvement visant l’efficacité de l’Église, lequel gagnait des adeptes dans les villes du Canada avant la guerre. Afin de mieux atteindre la classe ouvrière des villes, ce mouvement prônait une modernisation de l’organisation de l’institution et une gestion empruntée au monde des affaires de la part du clergé. De ce point de vue, le grand objectif de Bryce, à Earls court, a été de promouvoir le fonctionnement sexospécifique « efficace » de la famille ouvrière dans le cadre du nouvel ordre industriel et d’encourager l’accommodement entre travail et capital. Ferme ment implantée dans le christianisme social libéral, cette façon de voir repensait le rôle institutionnel de l’Église dans le monde industriel*

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*tout en promouvant une position modérée au sujet des relations sociales en régime capitaliste.*

The old methods of the Protestant churches were adapted to the family. The new must be adapted to the individual. The days of the Individual were upon us, let us deplore it as we might. The essential principle I stood for took shape in what, very inaccurately, came to be called the “institutional Church.”

W.S. Rainsford, *The Story of a Varied Life* (1922), p. 211.

My idea of a pastor is that of an apostle rather than a prophet; a man who institutionalizes a belief and an attitude toward life rather than a man who simply proclaims truth.

Shailer Mathews, *Scientific Management in the Churches* (1912), p. 44.

IN 1915, THE REVEREND Peter Bryce issued a pamphlet describing the “unusual features” of the Methodist ministry he had built up over the previous decade in the working-class suburb of Earlscourt, Toronto. At the time, he had been promoted to the position of superintendent of a new circuit comprising the Earlscourt church and six nearby suburban missions that had accompanied the pre-World War I expansion of Toronto’s northwestern boundary into the surrounding countryside. These rough-cut neighbourhoods were home to a large number of British immigrant working people, many of whom had purchased inexpensive lots and built their own dwellings.<sup>1</sup> According to Bryce, Earlscourt Methodist responded to these conditions by supplementing its “ordinary” church functions and operating as a broad-based centre of community life—an “institutional church”—that addressed a range of social needs and problems, helping residents maintain their families “in efficiency” through a combination of active pastoral guidance, social service, and community building.<sup>2</sup>

In many respects, the program Bryce developed at Earlscourt is a textbook example of early twentieth-century social Christianity. With support from neighbouring, established congregations and middle-class benefactors, his church expanded on the city missions and urban settlements that had appeared in Toronto and other major Canadian centres by the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> As with many of

1 Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto’s American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 21-50; on the relationship between industrialization, population growth, and church building in Toronto’s West End during this period, see Roberto Perin, *The Many Rooms of this House: Diversity in Toronto’s Places of Worship since 1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 43-52.

2 United Church Archives (hereafter UCA), Earlscourt United Church, Local History File, Peter Bryce, *Earlscourt Methodist Churches, Toronto* (c. 1915), pp. 5, 10.

3 Perin, *The Many Rooms of this House*, pp. 96-101; Cathy James, “Reforming Reform: Toronto’s Settlement House Movement, 1900-1920,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 82, no. 1 (March 2001): pp. 55-90; Rosalyn Trigger, “Protestant Restructuring in the Canadian City: Church and Mission in the Industrial

his contemporaries, Bryce’s work derived intellectual sustenance from Christian sociology and its growing influence within the Methodist Church on the eve of the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Just as integral to his philosophy and church practice, however, was a reconceptualization of the role of the community church and its clergy that found inspiration in international developments in practical Christianity and, notably, the ideas and methods of “church efficiency.”

Evident in urban social Christianity after the turn of the century, the efficiency movement expanded on efforts to offer an applied or practical message that connected Christian teachings to the various facets of everyday life. In so doing, efficiency advocates called for updated, modernized churches, epitomized by institution building, systematic clerical oversight, and energetic community organization. Partly an adaptive strategy aimed at accommodating the church to contemporary requirements, not least urban expansion and class-based spatial segregation, the basic objective of church efficiency was to make a viable place for an evangelical message in a modern industrialized world.<sup>5</sup> Among the major characteristics of this approach was a more activist public role for the clergy. Visualizing their churches as a vital institutional feature of modern society, “efficient” clergy understood their occupation as one that was comparable to the masculine community leadership roles assumed by those in business and government; it was a civic as well as a religious calling.<sup>6</sup>

The way Bryce conceived of it, practical Christianity and its expression in the efficient institutional church reconciled competing visions within Canadian Methodism concerning the persistence of traditional evangelicalism and the appropriate social role of the church.<sup>7</sup> It did so by harkening to the early Methodist movement’s emphasis on the practical necessity of Christian religion in confronting social conditions and reordering society from the inside, beginning with individuals and families. Stressing the organic linkages connecting individuals, families, and the larger community, Bryce bundled the ideas and practices of practical Christianity and church efficiency into an amenable strategy within the Methodist Church for confronting modern conditions, which he believed simply expanded

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Working-Class District of Griffintown, Montreal,” *Urban History Review*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Fall 2002): pp. 6-7.

4 Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), pp. 123-141; see also Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996) and *Christian Churches and their Peoples, 1840-1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 142-178.

5 Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), pp. 54-56; Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 48-82, 219-20; and Michael Gauvreau, “Factories and Foreigners: Church Life in Working-Class Neighbourhoods in Hamilton and Montreal, 1890-1930,” in Michael Gauvreau and Olivier Hubert, eds., *The Churches and Social Order in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), p. 228.

6 Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth*, pp. 219-220; on civic Christianity, see Nancy Christie, “Young Men and the Creation of Civic Christianity in Urban Methodist Churches, 1880-1914,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2006): pp. 79-105; and Christie and Gauvreau, *Christian Churches*, pp. 148-149.

7 Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, pp. 8-9.

upon and applied John Wesley's core message about guiding the individual sinner to salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to other experiments in practical Christianity in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain, Bryce geared this approach to the needs of a working-class and immigrant community and utilized and harnessed its social dynamics to fashion a program that neatly wedded modern individualism to a broader social program. In this respect, Earls court Methodist differed from working-class immigrant churches such as J. S. Woodsworth's All Peoples in Winnipeg, which focused on the "Canadianization" of eastern and central European parishioners and set as a primary purpose the "redemption" of industrial society; a form of Christian socialism that Woodsworth would later develop into a political movement.<sup>9</sup> With a predominantly British congregation, thus obviating the need to inculcate British Canadian norms, Bryce targeted his program at supporting the gendered functioning of the working class family within the new industrial order and promoting a spirit of accommodation between labour and capital. Located firmly within liberal social Christianity, this approach offered both a reconceptualization of the institutional role of the church in industrial life and a moderate position on capitalist social relations.

The case of Earls court draws attention to the linked problems of institutional change and adaptation, theological innovation, and patterns of urban working-class religiosity and church practice. A rigorous critical historiography on these subjects has re-examined the long-held view that urban conditions (widespread wage labouring and factory work; extensive immigration; poor housing and rapid residential expansion; and social and cultural isolation) and with them the growing presence of alternate and often market-based forms of collective organization and leisure (fraternal associations, labour unions, sports, and secular amusements) operated as powerful pull factors drawing working people out of the churches, if not diminishing their religiosity. According to proponents of the secularization thesis, the social gospel movement responded to the threat of urban-industrial change and scientific secularism by advancing a "modernist theology" that abandoned the individualist emphasis of traditional evangelicalism in favour of a watered-down, radically secular, "social" philosophy. In this formulation, the growing presence of "unchurched" workers, who were often immigrants, prompted what were ultimately alienating and unsuccessful attempts by middle-class reformers and progressive-minded clergy to assert influence and control over working-class lives through the mainline churches.<sup>10</sup>

8 On Wesley's vision, see David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 56-58.

9 The literature on Woodsworth is extensive. For a recent interpretation of his place in leftist politics, see Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), pp. 436-440.

10 See, for example, Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 4; see also David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 4-5. Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie have levied the most thorough criticism of this school. An abridged summary of their arguments appears in the introduction to *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, pp. xi-xiv.

The revisionist historiography has offered a reinterpretation that focuses on the social and cultural wellsprings of working-class religiosity and church life. A growing body of work in this vein approaches working-class religion from the standpoint of collective identities, drawing inspiration and analytical tools from labour history, while demonstrating that working-class religion was complex and embedded in a range of practices that often stood outside the middle-class norm considered in most standard treatments.<sup>11</sup> While greeted as a much-needed advance in understanding the place of religion not only in working-class life but in the constitution of social identity, social order, cultural authority, and political power, this work is not without its critics, largely owing to the thematic persistence of class alienation in explaining the distinctive patterns of working-class religion.<sup>12</sup> Recent work has shown, for example, that mainstream churches, and urban congregations particularly, were capable of negotiating class tensions and espousing a class-inclusive doctrine, and that working people enjoyed a good deal of agency in mixed-class churches through lay associational activity and voluntary management positions.<sup>13</sup>

Both stated and implicit in much of the recent work is the claim that urban industrial centres were vectors for the diffusion of varied tendencies in religious thought and practice. Just as working people flocked to American-style mass revivals in Canada’s cities, mainstream churches and liberal Protestantism broadly were also beneficiaries of urban diversity and organizational innovation.<sup>14</sup> In this climate, liberal evangelicalism was decisive in forging broad—if often fraught—doctrinal consensus across social groupings and charting institutional development in the first half of the twentieth century, offering a middle-of-the-road model of church life that enjoyed widespread appeal as late as the 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

11 See, for example, Eric R. Crouse, *Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); Melissa Turkstra, “Working-class Churches in Early Twentieth Century Hamilton: Fostering a Distinctive Working-class Identity and Culture,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, vol. 41, no. 82 (2008): pp. 459-503; and Edward Smith, “Working-Class Anglicans: Religion and Identity in Victorian and Edwardian Hamilton, Ontario,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, vol. 36, no. 71 (May 2003): pp. 123-144.

12 A strong influence on much of the social historical research on working-class religion over the course of the last two decades, Lynne Marks’ work features a nuanced variation on the alienation thesis. See her “Religion, Leisure, and Working-Class Identity,” in Paul Craven, ed., *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 295-297, and *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 12-13.

13 Gauvreau, “Factories and Foreigners,” pp. 227-229. Callum G. Brown’s work on secularization in Britain has likewise challenged the predictive value of class identity in determining engagement with organized religion and “churchgoing rates,” bringing to light problems of variations within the working-class, locational differences, and so on. See Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 149-156.

14 On urban revivalism, see Crouse, *Revival in the City*; Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, “‘The World of the Common Man is Filled with Religious Fervour’: The Labouring People of Winnipeg and the Persistence of Revivalism, 1914-1925,” in G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 337-350; for recent work on American mass-revivalism, see Jennifer Wiard, “The Gospel of Efficiency: Billy Sunday’s Revival Bureaucracy and Evangelicalism in the Progressive Era,” *Church History*, vol. 85, no. 3 (September 2016): pp. 587-616.

15 Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), pp. xix, 196-224.

What remains to be explored in greater depth is the interface between everyday religion and church practice and the ideas and institutional innovations that shaped liberal Protestantism—and, hence, the church leaders on the ground who were instrumental in forging such connections. To this end, the following study takes up Richard Allen's recent challenge to investigate "the transitional world" of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century clergy "who were close to popular religious culture, were its immediate respondents, were absorbing metropolitan models and intellectual influence, and were held in high esteem by the populace."<sup>16</sup> Peter Bryce's program at Earls court represented a significant effort along these lines, establishing mainstream liberal evangelical institutional arrangements that addressed and expressed the direct concerns and preferences of working-class people while embracing and applying some of the latest ideas in Christian sociology.

### Building a Suburban Mission

Although Bryce's work at Earls court drew heavily on his theoretical and practical training in Britain and Canada, it was grounded firmly in his working-class upbringing. He was born in 1877 at Lower Blantyre, Scotland, a small industrial town on the River Clyde twenty kilometres southeast of Glasgow, best known as the birthplace of Robert Livingstone. His father was a contractor whose livelihood suffered, requiring Bryce, who was just fourteen years old, to leave school. The young Bryce took jobs as a store clerk and later as a travelling sales agent. At eighteen he underwent a conversion experience and, at the urging of an older male friend, renounced his family's Presbyterian faith to become a member of the Methodist Church. Bryce later claimed that his reading of the life of Wesley during this period inspired him to join the church and become a preacher, a goal for which he studied at night after work. He soon began preaching as a lay minister in a working-class district of Blantyre, where he held services and conducted a Sunday school out of a decommissioned streetcar. From there he moved on to serve as an itinerant preacher in England. In 1903, his work brought him to Bay of Islands, Newfoundland, where he apprenticed as a missionary. Three years later, Bryce relocated to Toronto and enrolled in the theology program at Victoria College. He supplemented this program with special courses in sociology under the guidance of the economist James Mavor who had been lecturing to divinity students since 1898 at the request of the college principal, Nathaniel Burwash.<sup>17</sup>

16 Richard Allen, *The View from Murney Tower: Salem Bland, the Late Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. xxv.

17 Toronto *Star*, February 7, 1946, p. 8; United Church *Observer*, January 1, 1951, p. 5; Victor George Lewis, "Earls court, Toronto: a Descriptive, Historical and Interpretive Study in Urban Working Class Development" (master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1920), ch. 11; Douglas Walkington, *Methodist Ministers in Canada* (Toronto: United Church Archives, 1981), p. 46; *The Canadian Who's Who*, Vol. 5, 1949-1951 (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, nd.), p. 132; Toronto Public Library (hereafter TPL), Biography File, "Peter Bryce" (undated copy of an article from the Toronto *Star Weekly*, c. 1912); on Bryce's "personal guidance" under the tutelage of Mavor, see St. John's *The Evening Advocate*, November 19, 1919, p. 2; on Mavor's impact on social Christianity, see Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, p. 82; on Burwash, see Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).



Bryce assumed the post of lay pastor at Earls court in 1906 while still a divinity student, receiving his ordination two years later. Prior to this commission, he had spent time working with the labouring poor in a section of King Street in downtown Toronto. While there his supervisor, a former minister at Westmoreland Methodist who had been doing missionary service in nearby Earls court, recommended Bryce for the more permanent position. Bryce was well suited to the task. With his working-class origins and extensive experience in missions he shared with many progressive clergy of his generation a close familiarity with working-class life.<sup>18</sup>

For its part, Earls court was an ideal commission for a young Methodist clergyman of Bryce’s background steeped in Christian sociology. Isolated in both a physical and cultural sense from the established urban core, Earls court bore the hallmarks of the “interface” of older settled religious traditions and processes of “change and mobility” in which evangelical denominations such as Methodism had traditionally flourished in Britain and abroad.<sup>19</sup> Situated at St. Clair Avenue and Dufferin Street at Toronto’s northwest extremity, the district was a product of the city’s rapid rise by the turn of the century as a regional industrial centre and a major destination for working-class immigrants.<sup>20</sup> This high volume of incoming immigrant workers placed pressure on existing housing capacity, hastening a process of unregulated suburbanization that was heavily dependent on owner building.<sup>21</sup> Similar to other new suburbs along the city’s boundaries, Earls court nonetheless differed in important respects from major industrial satellite neighbourhoods such as the Junction and New Toronto. The latter were primarily residential extensions of nearby industries, while Earls court residents fanned out to a wide variety of workplaces. By 1920, these included not only large employers in the northwest of Toronto, such as Canada Foundry, Dominion Radiator, Gutta Percha Rubber, Toronto Carpet, Union Stockyards, and Willys-Overland/CCM, but also sites further afield such as Eaton’s department store, garment factories in the downtown core, and scattered construction projects throughout the city.<sup>22</sup>

In large measure, those settling in Earls court were working-class immigrants from England, Ireland, and Scotland, and to a lesser extent Wales and Newfoundland. This profile reflects Toronto’s overall demographic pattern by the first decade of the twentieth century. Figures by 1911 census district indicate that 27.1% of the city’s total population of 327,753 were born in Britain. Of those, English-born comprised 63.0%, Scots-born 19.3%, and Irish-born 16.5%. The sectoral distribution of British immigrants was evenly divided. The largest proportion of British-born to overall population was located in Toronto East at 31.3%, followed by Toronto South at 30.8%, Toronto West at 26.7%, Toronto North at 24.5%,

18 Walkington, *Methodist Ministers*, p. 46; *Canadian Who’s Who*, p. 132; Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, pp. 41-42.

19 Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 19; Trigger, “Protestant Restructuring.”

20 Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*, pp. 25-32, 149; see also Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto – 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 11-14.

21 Toronto News, May 9, 1907, p. 7; *Globe* (magazine supplement), November 9, 1907; *Star*, December 17, 1909, p. 8; *Star Weekly*, March 25, 1911, p. 11; and *Saturday Night*, January 3, 1914, p. 9.

22 Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*, p. 82; Nancy Byers and Barbara Myrvold, *St. Clair West in Pictures: A History of the Communities of Carlton, Davenport, Earls court, and Oakwood* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1999), p. 75.

and Toronto Centre at 22.3%.<sup>23</sup> In addition to census data, anecdotal evidence also indicates a large British immigrant presence in the Earls court district. “[T]he people were mainly British immigrants,” recalled a former resident. “They worked with their hands—painters, plasterers, carpenters and bricklayers.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the Toronto *Globe* reported in 1908 that “thousands of recently-arrived British immigrants—sturdy English and Scotch mechanics and laborers—have built little houses of their own” at Earls court and other nearby suburbs.<sup>25</sup>

Christian missions were among the first institutions to appear at Earls court. By 1910, in addition to the Methodists, the Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Salvation Army had set up in the district.<sup>26</sup> These early churches were often rudimentary. A Methodist mission at Prospect Park, to the west of Earls court, met in a mothballed streetcar; other missions held services outdoors or in dining tents during the warmer months and in schools during the winter. St. Clare Catholic Church held services in nearby St. Clare School until the present church was built in 1914.<sup>27</sup> Prior to Peter Bryce’s arrival, Methodists at Earls court had held worship services outdoors and in a private home, and Sunday Bible classes for children met at the local public school. Support for these fledgling churches drew on a combination of local initiative, material and organizational resources from older, neighbouring congregations, and funding from denominational bodies. A desire for both a local place of worship and Christian education for children, as well as concern on the part of established residents to reach “un-churched” workers and immigrants, were major factors behind these efforts.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly before Bryce’s arrival in 1906, a group of local residents along with members from Westmoreland Methodist, a congregation to the immediate south of Earls court, founded the Boon Avenue Mission, the precursor to Earls court Methodist. The Methodist Social Union of Toronto, an organization dedicated to promoting “fellowship, social intercourse, and the spirit of Christian enterprise among members of Methodist churches and congregations in Toronto,” provided \$550 to purchase land and erect a building. Older congregations and individual benefactors supplied small gifts of money and costly fixtures such as an organ and bench seating, and local men volunteered to help with the construction of the mission building, a simple one-storey rectangular structure.<sup>29</sup>

23 Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada*, Vol. II (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1913), table xv, pp. 403-404.

24 Interview with Frank Fisher in Bill Bailey, ed., *Stories of York* (Toronto: York Historical Society, 1980), p. 63; see also Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*, p. 134.

25 *Globe*, January 28, 1908, p. 1.

26 See TPL, Local History Files, Churches, “St. David’s United Church,” “Anglican Churches – St. Mark’s, Calvary, and St. Chad’s,” “Earls court Corps History”; see also TPL, Local History Files, Churches, Boon Avenue Baptist Church, *Through the Years: A Pictorial Sketch of 60 Years of Service to Christ and the Community* (Toronto: Boon Avenue Baptist Church, 1965), p. 1; TPL, Local History Files, Churches, Prospect Park United Church, *A Short History of Prospect United Church* (Toronto: Prospect Park United Church, 1957), p. 1; TPL, Local History Files, Churches, Earls court United Church, *Days Should Speak! A Half-Century in Christ’s Service, 1905-1955* (Toronto: Earls court United Church, 1955), p. 6.

27 John E. Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), pp. 135-136; Byers and Myrvold, *St. Clair West*, p. 69.

28 UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 14.

29 *Manual of the Methodist Social Union of Toronto* (Toronto: Massey Press, 1897), pp. 7, 10; UCA, Executive Committee of the Methodist Social Union of Toronto, Minute Book, Vol. 2, 1905-1912, 84.050C, Box 1, 6



During Bryce’s first two-year tenure, the church busily organized along traditional Methodist lines. By 1908, a Ladies Aid Society, Men’s Own Brotherhood, and the youth Epworth Leagues had been formed. These organizations served a dual purpose: they provided an aged and gendered associational framework for a growing membership while functioning as vehicles for raising much needed funds. Issues of finance were indeed pressing at this early stage, with money for basics like heating fuel and the pastor’s and caretaker’s salaries in short supply. The Ladies Aid was counted on to raise the caretaker’s salary but appeals for outside assistance were necessary. When the congregation requested a year extension for Bryce, for example, the Methodist Social Union and the Missionary Board of the Methodist church offered monetary support. The Wesley Methodist church also helped out with furnishing a parsonage, which was critical in retaining Bryce, who married in 1909.<sup>30</sup>

### The Institutional Church

The extension of Bryce’s tenure was a departure from the established mission model, where itinerancy was the norm.<sup>31</sup> A meeting of the quarterly board early in 1910 indicates a rationale for this decision. The minutes record that Bryce had been in communication with the Methodist Social Union (MSU), which had agreed to support an expansion project at the church. The MSU proposed the construction of a “model brick school that would for the present be also used for church purposes, costing somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$16,000.”<sup>32</sup> After setting up a building fund, planners expanded on the original idea of a Sunday school to include a large multipurpose church; the result, Earls court Methodist, opened its doors to the public in early 1911. According to the *Christian Guardian*, this “new institutional church [was] the most costly and fully equipped of its kind in Canadian Methodism.”<sup>33</sup> A bulky edifice of austere red brick, the church boasted a large Sunday school, gymnasium, nursery, and model kitchen, the latter “fitted up by Mrs. John C. [Lillian] Eaton” for special use in cooking classes.<sup>34</sup> The designers also converted the old mission building into a library and installed a playground in its yard.

Not to be confused with the familiar general expression for an organized denominational body, the term institutional church in the sense used by the *Christian Guardian* carried a more specific meaning during this period. It referred to churches that focused on serving working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods, functioning as community centres providing a range of both religious and secular

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June 1906, pp. 30-31.

<sup>30</sup> UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board of the Earls court Methodist Church, F 1793, Box 7, file 4, pp. 2-15.

<sup>31</sup> In 1919, the prohibitionist *Evening Advocate* (St. John’s, Newfoundland) (November 19, 1919, p. 2) claimed that Bryce “had been longer in the one charge than any other Methodist minister in Canada.” For the debate on itineracy in the Methodist Church during this period, see “Conference Neutral on Itinerary System,” *Globe*, June 17 1914, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Christian Guardian*, April 19, 1911, p. 24. The cost of building was in fact relatively modest when compared with other West End Toronto churches built during the period. See Perin, *The Many Rooms of This House*, pp. 48-49, table 2.1.

<sup>34</sup> *Star Weekly*, June 3, 1911, p. 7; *Globe*, April 3, 1911, p. 9.

services.<sup>35</sup> Dating to the early 1890s, and closely connected to the Broad Church movement in the Anglican and Episcopalian churches, institutional churches extended the urban settlement and city mission work being carried out in major North American centres, combining concerns for social reform with the viability of existing congregations.<sup>36</sup> W. S. Rainsford's St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City typified the rehabilitated urban church and the effectiveness of systematic reorganization in reaching a working-class community.<sup>37</sup> As Rainsford's example made clear, the essence of the institutional church was to do "whatever is needed in the locality where it is placed" and there undertake functions "not performed ... by the home and society at large." Typically, institutional churches featured amenities such as gymnasiums, sports fields, libraries, kitchens, shower and bath facilities, and a range of educational programs, clubs and associations, social events, and literary and musical entertainments. In some cases, such unorthodox attractions as smoking rooms and poolrooms were used to entice congregants, notably young males, to the church life.<sup>38</sup> Central to the program of the institutional church was the pastor, who, as George Hodges and John Reichert suggest in their history of Rainsford's work, functioned much like an executive administrator in a "business house" combining managerial acumen with community leadership qualities. Close pastoral attention to such matters as record keeping, church finance, organizing clubs, and providing religious instruction to young people was essential to the effective operation of an institutional church. Large staffs of clerical and lay helpers were also common.<sup>39</sup>

The model spread to Canada by the turn of the century. In 1898 the *Toronto Star* reported on the growing influence of the idea as an effective method of reaching the people "by appeals to the material as well as the spiritual side of humanity, in a belief that an extension of the scope of work is a broadening of the soul-winning power." The institutional church was open to all, the article noted, regardless of denominational affiliation, and featured gymnasiums, showers, reading rooms, practical education classes, and a wide range of clubs. In this way, "such a church becomes a school or an institute."<sup>40</sup> In 1903, at St. James' Anglican Church in London, Ontario, organizers cited the work of Rainsford (who had once served as a minister at Toronto's St. James Anglican Cathedral) as an example of how "up-to-date methods in the work of evangelizing" might effectively be applied to the problem of "accentuating the social side of church life.... especially in regard to the young men." "The idea is along the line of what has come to be known

35 Josiah Strong, "Institutional Churches," in William D.P. Bliss, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1908), p. 629; Phillips, *Kingdom on Earth*, pp. 70-72.

36 Tod E. Jones, *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement* (London: Lexington Books, 2003); see also George Martin, "Charles C. Burlingham and St. George's Church, New York," *Anglican and Episcopal History*, vol. 72, no. 3 (September 2003): pp. 322-350.

37 George Hodges and John Reichert, *The Administration of an Institutional Church: A Detailed Account of the Operation of St. George's Parish in the City of New York* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1906); see also Phillips, *Kingdom on Earth*, pp. 70-72; and Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (London: Archon, 1962), pp. 147-150.

38 Strong, "Institutional Churches," p. 629.

39 Hodges and Reichert, *Institutional Church*, p. 1.

40 *Star*, October 4, 1898, p. 4.

as the institutional church,” the *Toronto Star* reported, “of which St. George’s Episcopal Church in New York is probably the most conspicuous example. City missions, technical training schools, lecture courses, libraries, physical training, are the means employed to get at the young men.”<sup>41</sup>

As with Rainsford’s St. George’s, Canadian institutional churches came to be identified with developments in inner-city life. The phenomenon of middle-class evacuation of downtown districts, followed by the migration of established churches, was a serious concern for Canadians who worried about the loss of adequate Christian services in downtown working-class districts and the breakdown of “Christian citizenship” among the growing immigrant populations.<sup>42</sup> The best known Canadian example of a church responding to the needs of the urban working class was All Peoples Mission in North End Winnipeg, which achieved national prominence under the pioneering leadership of J. S. Woodsworth. Upon taking up his commission there in 1907, Woodsworth reorganized the church, doubling the existing staff of twelve and creating a program of educational outreach through a network of local institutes. By the time he left All People’s in 1914, Woodsworth had become the most prominent advocate for this model in Canada, publishing numerous articles and reports on the mission’s work in the country’s foremost Methodist journal, the *Christian Guardian*.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, interest in spreading the concept further west to newly settled areas was pronounced during the period. In 1905, for example, the well-known Presbyterian clergyman and Christian novelist, C. W. Gordon (Ralph Connor), offered \$500 in seed money to any Presbyterian congregation able to raise \$1,500 towards establishing an institutional church in Alberta or British Columbia.<sup>44</sup>

For their part, Toronto’s church leaders contemplated ways of utilizing institutional churches to serve the city’s swelling neighbourhoods. Beginning in 1903, the Elm Street Methodist Church, in the heart of the working-class immigrant reception hub, St. John’s Ward (or simply “The Ward” to contemporaries), had adopted institutional church methods, which included providing educational services to young working-class men and women towards helping them write matriculation exams to enter university.<sup>45</sup> In a 1906 address to Toronto’s Ministerial Association, the Reverend A. B. Winchester proposed dividing the city into districts, each of which was to be served by an ecumenical, well-equipped institutional church.<sup>46</sup> In 1908, the “‘forward ranks’ of the leading Christian workers of the city” discussed plans “concerning the viability of converting an old Shea’s Theatre in the city’s downtown into an institutional church.”<sup>47</sup> That same year, St. Mark’s Presbyterian, which served a working-class congregation

41 *Star*, January 24, 1903, p. 20.

42 *Globe*, March 14, 1905, p. 6.

43 George Emery, *The Methodist Church on the Prairies, 1896-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), pp. 140-156; Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, pp. 50-51; and Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 41.

44 *Star*, December 9, 1905, p. 30.

45 *Star*, March 20, 1909, p. 7.

46 *Globe*, December 11, 1906, p. 14.

47 *Globe*, July 6, 1908, p. 12.

in the downtown West End, was grappling with chronic membership decline. According to the Toronto *Star*, the church was “situated in the very heart of the manufacturing district” and “for years had done little more than keep its doors open.” With the arrival of an energetic young minister, John D. Morrow, the congregants hoped for a new larger building—the “first real institutional church in Toronto”—to capitalize on the energy of the progressive new pastor.<sup>48</sup> In 1909, Cooke’s Presbyterian Church in Toronto’s downtown East End announced similar plans.<sup>49</sup>

For a rapidly expanding centre such as Toronto, church leaders naturally came to see the institutional church as an ideal means of serving new emerging districts on the outer boundaries of the city. In Toronto’s expanding northwest district, Congregational leaders debated in 1906 the merits of establishing an institutional church at Dovercourt Road, as suggested by a Reverend Mason, a visitor from the United States.<sup>50</sup> In the spring of 1910, the Dunn Avenue Presbyterian Church opened an \$18,000 institutional church at Parkdale, to the southwest of the city. Along with the customary gymnasium, showers, and reading room, the church also offered outdoor space for tennis and lawn bowling in the summer.<sup>51</sup>

Bryce was attentive to these developments while he ministered to the people of Earls court. In early 1910, in an early example of his occasional work as a Christian columnist, he made the case in the *Christian Guardian* for the need to build institutional churches in the expanding suburban districts of Canada’s major cities, including Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver. According to Bryce, “as cities grow in size the proportion of church-goers decreases” there was an increasingly urgent practical need for this type of church. He presented statistical evidence of this phenomenon occurring in London, New York, and Berlin, where the proportion of the population attending church on a regular basis was shockingly low. In contrast, he pointed to successful examples of institutional churches reaching the working class in a host of Northern English cities, including Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, and Liverpool.<sup>52</sup> With his own institutional church up and running at Earls court a year later, Bryce was able to put these ideas into practice.

### Social Christianity and Church Efficiency

On the basis of membership numbers, at best a rough guide, his efforts enjoyed measurable success and would seem to bear out the rationale for the institutional church model. At Earls court, an official membership of 60 persons in 1909 had grown tenfold to 600 five years later, and in 1919 the church reported 1,033 in full membership. These figures levelled off to just under 1,000 by 1930, a partial

48 *Star*, July 8, 1908, p. 5. As it happened, St. Mark’s fell to the wrecking ball just four years later. Morrow moved on to minister at Dale Presbyterian, also in Toronto’s West End. See Perin, *The Many Rooms of this House*, pp. 76-77.

49 *Globe*, October 16, 1909, p. 28.

50 *Globe*, December 18, 1906, p. 8.

51 *Globe*, April 29, 1910, p. 8; see also Perin, *The Many Rooms of this House*, pp. 87-88.

52 A summary of Bryce’s *Christian Guardian* article appeared in the *Star*, March 12, 1910, p. 19.

consequence no doubt of the extension of his program into neighbouring districts.<sup>53</sup> When the North Earls court and Fairbank missions came under his superintendancy in September 1912, the circuit of six missions was fully established.<sup>54</sup> By 1930, five years after church union, viable churches remained in place at Fairbank (165 members), Oakwood (325), Prospect Park (220), and Silverthorne (330).<sup>55</sup>

Earls court Methodist, renamed Earls court Central Church, served as the administrative headquarters of this mini-circuit system. At the Central Church a management regime was put in place to administer the circuit, with a superintendent and associate superintendent as the senior executives, and two deaconesses and an administrative assistant to help in managing the central office. Five student pastors were detailed to the respective missions. To encourage “local initiative and autonomy” Bryce arranged for each mission to have its own board of management. The job of the mission boards was to oversee “membership, organizations, finances and the general work of the congregation” and to report to the Quarterly Board meetings at the Central Church. Bryce claimed that this plan had been developed “in the interests of good government, pastoral oversight and economy, consistent with a true conception of the potentialities of a suburban church in a growing district.” He likened this approach to that of a father guiding the spiritual and moral development of a child: “Thus, the child may grow in favour of God and man, and when able to manage its own affairs will be encouraged to do so.”<sup>56</sup>

Bryce brought to this innovative circuit system a practical theology that focused on the connection between moral “regeneration” and social reform, concerns that reflected his studies under Burwash and Mavor.<sup>57</sup> These ideas harmonized with Bryce’s reading of the Methodist tradition, which had emphasized the ethical linkages between individual salvation, community discipline, and national renewal.<sup>58</sup> Later in life, Bryce described John Wesley as “the greatest social reformer of his age,” a man who had “brought to England a new sense of human values, and a new appreciation of human obligations.”<sup>59</sup> He placed this social conception of Methodism within the scope of the traditional role of religion in defining communities, a role that many of his generation had become convinced was radically diminished and threatened by urban industrialization and expansion. For Bryce, “the adequate expression of Christianity” was “the regeneration of the social life,” a goal that was best accomplished “by the regeneration of the individual and the regeneration of the conditions under which the individual must live.”<sup>60</sup>

53 Methodist Church of Canada, *Methodist Year Book, 1915* (Toronto: Briggs, 1915), pp. 136-139; Methodist Church of Canada, *Methodist Year Book, 1919* (Toronto: Briggs, 1919), pp. 24-25.

54 UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, p. 47.

55 United Church of Canada, *Year Book, 1930* (United Church of Canada, 1930), pp. 414-415.

56 UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, pp. 8, 10.

57 Carol Thora Baines, “From Women’s Benevolence to Professional Social Work: The Case of the Wimodausis Club and the Earls court Children’s Home, 1902-1971” (PhD diss, University of Toronto, 1990), p. 49.

58 Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 15, 16.

59 *Star*, February 7, 1946, p. 8.

60 *Star*, May 7, 1919, p. 6.

Such statements were not uncommon during a period churning with anxious debates over the moral limits of individualism and the urgency of “the social.”<sup>61</sup> By invoking a traditional Methodist message and emphasizing the link between individual salvation and social reform, Bryce’s thinking on evangelicalism and Christian sociology placed him as a moderate among social gospellers. In this respect, he differed from perhaps his most prominent progressive contemporaries, Salem Bland and Woodsworth (another of Burwash’s students).<sup>62</sup> While Woodsworth’s agonizing doctrinal scepticism had guided him towards a career in social Christianity, it was his deepening conviction concerning the ontological priority of social existence that led him to more radical church experiments and eventually a long career in socialist politics.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, Bryce advocated a progressive social agenda rooted firmly in an evangelical foundation of individualism, a position from which he did not deviate throughout his long career. For Bryce, an organic evangelicalism informed by social evolutionary ideas, such as those of the Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond,<sup>64</sup> was central to this project; it acknowledged the interdependence of personal spirituality and the environmental factors that militated against its development, ideas entirely consistent with his interpretation of Wesley’s teaching.

In his work at Earls court, then, Bryce identified as his immediate task the need to support and rehabilitate the Christian individual and family as they grappled with the demands of industrial society. According to Bryce, the primary goal of many of Earls court’s residents was to own a house, yet their ability to “maintain a family in efficiency” was “a task of herculean proportions” entailing “a tremendous struggle for at least five years, combined with the utmost self-denial.”<sup>65</sup> The result was that in their daily struggles many were unable to cope and succumbed to worldly temptations. The innovations Bryce introduced were therefore intended to break down the barriers working people faced in developing their spiritual lives and in their engagement with organized religion. In so doing, however, he did not make his appeal primarily on the basis of innovation and novelty. First and foremost, in his efforts to reach Earls court’s labouring people he recognized the enduring attraction of old-time evangelical religion. In 1911, he distributed an open letter of invitation to the residents of the district that captured this quality. “We believe in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of men,” it announced, “and we emphasize the word Saviour, for he saves both from the guilt and the power of sin.”<sup>66</sup> Far from alienating parishioners, the emphasis on sin, personal salvation, and the redemptive power of Christ has been shown to have resonated with working people.<sup>67</sup> In addition, to better communicate his message

61 Alan Hunt, “Measuring Morals: The Beginnings of the Social Survey Movement in Canada, 1913-1917,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, vol. 35, no. 69 (2002): pp. 171-194.

62 On Bland, see Allen, *View from Murney Tower*, pp. xxi-xii; and McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, pp. 232-237.

63 McNaught, *Prophet in Politics*, pp. 20-29, 79-87; Emery, *Methodist Church on the Prairies*, pp. 147-150.

64 Lewis, “Earls court,” p. 107.

65 UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, pp. 10-11.

66 Rev. Peter Bryce, quoted in TPL, *Days Should Speak*, p. 8.

67 See Crouse, *Revival in the City*, p. 13; Gauvreau and Christie, “The World of the Common Man,” pp. 337-350. In a profile of Bryce that appeared in his master’s thesis on Earls court, University of Toronto student Victor Lewis claimed that in his preaching Bryce avoided scolding congregants for their sinful lives. See



Bryce cultivated a down-to-earth persona and a common-sense ethos in his work. In his sermons, for example, he was known to use folksy rhetorical techniques, such as evoking the ever-present mud of the frontier-like district as a metaphor for the daily struggle with sin and hardship, the importance of spiritual perseverance, and the possibility of transcendence.<sup>68</sup> His 1911 statement of faith expressed this attitude clearly, placing an emphasis on “the Christ of the present, holding a man fast in the time of temptation, helping him in the time of weakness, strengthening him in the time of sorrow, leading him in the way of service and happiness. Our message is practical, our singing hearty, our welcome to the stranger sincere.”<sup>69</sup> In this appeal, moreover, were the conventional hallmarks of practical Christianity with its emphasis on Christ as a model of here-and-now pragmatism and its muting of denominational distinction.

Nonetheless, from this immediate concern for establishing a welcoming, practical, and familiar evangelical culture locally, Bryce envisioned a broader project of social regeneration and community building. “[O]ur programme of service presents some unusual features,” he acknowledged in his 1915 pamphlet. “They have all been prompted by a need which we were constrained to supply. Aggression, organization, adaptation, efficiency and evangelism may be claimed as characteristics of our work.”<sup>70</sup> The word “efficiency” is critical here, since it expressed another key feature of Bryce’s practical theology and Christian sociology. Drawing inspiration from the latest currents in Christian thought, church efficiency in this sense advocated a new institutional role for the churches in the evolving structures of modern industrial society. Rather than balking at the secular propagandizing of scientific management, proponents of church efficiency found inspiration in the doctrines of applied science and business efficiency in an effort to revamp churches as vital community institutions.<sup>71</sup> Echoing the ideas of the institutional church movement, church efficiency called for functional and multipurpose facilities, qualified pastoral leadership, methodical planning and management, standardization of practices, careful division of labour within the ministry and its departments, sophisticated marketing, and a host of other rational improvements.<sup>72</sup> Suffused through much of the efficiency rhetoric was a sense of the possibilities of social scientific analysis—the “capacity to understand actual conditions and to study them in the light of certain definite rules”<sup>73</sup>—and its

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Lewis, “Earlscourt,” p. 105.

68 Lewis, “Earlscourt,” p. 105.

69 Rev. Peter Bryce, quoted in TPL, *Days Should Speak*, p. 8.

70 Bryce, *Earlscourt Methodist Churches*, p. 5.

71 Samuel W. Dike, “Shall Churches Increase their Efficiency by Scientific Methods?” *American Journal of Theology*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 1912): pp. 20-30; William T. Doherty, “The Impact of Business on Protestantism, 1900-29,” *Business History Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (June 1954): pp. 141-153. For the impact of social reform on Canadian business, see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 133-147.

72 Shailer Mathews, “Theological Seminaries as Schools of Religious Efficiency,” *The Biblical World*, vol. 47, no. 2 (February 1916): p. 75.

73 Shailer Mathews, *Scientific Management in the Churches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912), p. 1.

systematic application, the ultimate purpose of which was to buttress the Christian message in challenging times.

For the liberal theologian Shailer Mathews, the influential dean of the University of Chicago's School of Divinity and a leading writer in the church efficiency movement, there was an acute need during this period to rationalize and "institutionalize" the evangelical purpose of Protestant religion if the latter was to be effective in the modern age.<sup>74</sup> From his perspective, institutional modernization would not dissociate churches from an emphasis on personal religious experience, contrary to the protests of evangelical critics who interpreted such tendencies within social Christianity as doomed efforts to compete with scientific secularism. Rather, efficient churches were those that were most effective at organizing the transformative elements of Christian religion while confronting modern obstacles to a productive religious life. According to Mathews, the broad imperative of church efficiency was "the socializing of the gospel." The efficient church, in this sense, "must seek to evangelize the constructive forces of society in order that society may be an aid rather than a hindrance to Christian life." Mathews suggested that this was especially the case in the "undeveloped community" where "the church is engaged in performing tasks that the community ought to be performing."<sup>75</sup>

### **Family Efficiencies and Community Service**

Clearly, this is what Bryce was getting at when he spoke of the "unusual features" of his program at Earls court. As we have seen, like many of the Christian progressives of his generation he associated environmental factors—both structural and physical—with the problem of moral and spiritual renewal. Chief among these were economic stressors, which caused a range of disorders, from unhealthy living conditions to dubious coping strategies; and at a fundamental level, bodies, through basic physical fitness, manifested these "inefficiencies."

For Bryce, Earls court confronted numerous environmental problems as an "undeveloped community" but it also offered rare opportunities for physical and spiritual development that were not available in the established core of the city. Extolling Earls court's positive features in a 1912 letter to the purity activist and public health authority, Helen MacMurchy, Bryce observed that Earls court was "situated on a hill over-looking the City, the air is free from smoke, and is pure and bracing."<sup>76</sup> These ideas spoke directly to the concerns of the purity movement and its efforts to reform the "degenerating" city both in terms of its sanitation and its impact on morality, objectives often expressed in race discourse, anxieties over

74 Shailer Mathews, "A Professional Reading Course on the Efficient Church," *Biblical World*, vol. 39, no. 2 (February 1912): p. 117. This article was the first Mathews published in a four-part "reading course" covering some twenty titles on the subject of church efficiency. See also *Biblical World*, vol. 39, no. 3 (March 1912): pp. 200-205; *Biblical World*, vol. 39, no. 2 (May 1912): pp. 346-350; and *Biblical World*, vol. 39, no. 6 (June 1912): pp. 414-419.

75 Mathews, "Efficient Church," pp. 117, 119; on Mathews, see Curtis, *Consuming Faith*, pp. 48-59; on Mathews's influence among Canadian clergy, see Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, pp. 115-116.

76 TPL, Local History Files – Dufferin/St. Clair Branch, Rev. Peter Bryce to Dr. Helen MacMurchy, October 25, 1912.

immigration and urban crowding, and the idealization of rural areas as healthful places.<sup>77</sup> Commentators in the press echoed these ideas, describing how semi-rural Earls court benefitted from the apparent advantages of being isolated from inner city problems. While critical of the ramshackle character of the new suburban districts, for example, the Toronto *Globe* noted that these new neighbourhoods were a preferable alternative to "the crowding of mothers and babies and heart-weary men into the cellars and squalid places of the low-class sections of the city."<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the idealization of the physical and spiritual benefits of suburban districts such as Earls court spoke to a demand during this period, typical across the Christian denominations, for the churches to nurture the "whole person."<sup>79</sup> Thus the Dovercourt Land, Building and Savings Company, which sold lots in the district, praised Earls court in familiar terms as a "healthful district" and a "refuge from the foul air, heat, noise, and dirt of the crowded city."<sup>80</sup> But as a central feature of its sales pitch, the company's 1910 land sales brochure also devoted space to describing the nourishing features of the new Earls court church, which was then under construction: "It is not an ordinary church, it is an institutional Church. It meets the wants of all who like to come. It is broad, both in its doctrine and in its practice. It will work for the betterment of the bodies as well as the souls of all.... It will have baths for both sexes, a gymnasium for giving well-rounded athletic bodies to youths of the district."<sup>81</sup>

It was not enough, however, that Earls court was safely removed from the harmful physical and moral effects of inner-urban life. The impact of industrialization was far reaching and, in Bryce's estimation, exposed the working-class family to poverty, vice, internal disorder, and breakdown. Thus, at Earls court Methodist an extensive lay associational culture took up much of the work of instilling personal and familial efficiencies by promoting healthy social relationships and what were deemed proper family roles. Clubs for women, men, and young people offered religious support while providing scope for lay initiative with close pastoral oversight. They encouraged traditional religious practices such as Bible study and hymn singing, stressed Christian ethics, and provided forums for wholesome sociability. In the process, they both assumed and explicitly encouraged the internalization of age and gender roles as well as class priorities.

For Bryce, threats to what he considered to be women's special role as primary child care providers was the central problem in realizing family efficiency. Much of his work while at Earls court and his later activity in social welfare, notably as chair of the provincial Mothers' Allowances Commission during the early 1920s, addressed problems associated with the economic strains placed on mothers.<sup>82</sup>

77 Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), pp. 129-130.

78 *Globe* (magazine supplement), November 9, 1907, n.p.

79 Perin, *The Many Rooms of this House*, pp. 87-91.

80 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), Dinnick Family Papers, F 175, MU 919, Dovercourt Land, Building and Savings Company, *Who Gets Your Wages? You or the Landlord?* (Toronto: Dovercourt Land, Building and Savings Company, c. 1910), p. 10.

81 AO, *Who Gets Your Wages?* pp. 18-19.

82 Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 96, 106.

Although Bryce helped find work for women in the district, often as domestics, he nevertheless held the opinion that the working mother was an “unnatural condition” and that the absence from the family of an appropriate female nurturing figure was a serious problem. “One may imagine how the health of the child is jeopardized by the absence of the mother, and [how] the mother herself suffers in health,” he remarked in a 1913 article in the *Christian Guardian*.<sup>83</sup> To address the linked problems of the “inadequate wage” and the working mother Bryce founded the Earls court Children’s Home in 1913 in collaboration with the Methodist Department of Evangelism and Social Service and the Wimodausis Club (a middle-class women’s benevolent association).<sup>84</sup> Located in a converted rooming-house near the church, and placed under the superintendancy of Hattie Inkpen, the Children’s Home provided shelter and meals for the children of working mothers, widowers, and men whose wives were incapacitated owing to sickness; it also housed a labour bureau.<sup>85</sup> At the Home, children were admitted temporarily on a daily or weekly basis for a minimal fee and supervised by a deaconess from the church. According to Bryce, the facility provided a safe and caring environment for children aimed in large measure at ensuring the community’s future development upon a Christian foundation. “It means much to the child to have wholesome food and good care,” Bryce wrote in a description of the Home’s work in the *Guardian*. “Then the family prayer, the little habits of cleanliness, the good-night stories, are as good seed in a ground where, until now, we could not sow.”<sup>86</sup>

If the children’s home helped mothers to balance the unavoidable burdens of making a living and raising a family, enabling people “to do for themselves what they otherwise could not do,” women’s church associations extended this idea.<sup>87</sup> They did so by providing guided lay initiative combined with a strong element of mutualism. Among the church’s numerous associations, the Ladies’ Aid Society, the Women’s Missionary Society, and the Mothers’ Meeting were the most active and best attended. They engaged district women in a range of activities from mutual-aid, fundraising for missions and church expenses, to organizing bazaars, annual community picnics, and Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter festivities.<sup>88</sup> Through committees of as many as fifty local laywomen and with support from the Department of Social Service and Evangelism, these groups organized and promoted programs such as the annual two-day women’s institutes, which included expert lectures, child welfare exhibits, and baby shows.<sup>89</sup> These

83 *Christian Guardian*, May 7, 1913, p. 11. In an article on the minimum wage, Bryce argued that “The labor of women outside the home constitutes one of the most vital problems in Canadian life.” See *Star*, May 7, 1919, p. 6.

84 In 1914, the Methodist Church changed the title of the Department of Evangelism and Social Service to the Department of Social Service and Evangelism.

85 Bryce, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 13.

86 *Christian Guardian*, May 7, 1913, p. 10.

87 *Christian Guardian*, May 7, 1913, p. 11; see also Department of Social Service and Evangelism, “The Earls court Children’s Home,” in *Christianization of Canadian Life: Annual Report* (Toronto: Department of Social Service and Evangelism, 1916-1917), pp. 87-88; see also Baines, “Women’s Benevolence.”

88 UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 19, 23, 34, 48, 52; see also *Star*, August 13, 1914, p. 13; *Star*, October 7, 1914, p. 9; and *Star*, December 13, 1917, p. 22.

89 UCA, Hugh Dobson Papers, box A4, file B, Dobson to Bryce, September 23, 1918; and *Star*, May 22, 1918, p. 21.

clubs were useful venues through which Bryce was able to promote his efficiency agenda. The Mother’s Meeting, for example, hosted regular talks that focused on practical issues relating to home or church, and members attended weekly clinics and “Mother Craft” classes under the direction of the Toronto Department of Public Health. The goal of the latter was to instruct women on techniques of keeping a clean and well-organized home while also offering courses on a variety of health subjects.<sup>90</sup> In 1912, the church hired a health nurse to advise and instruct local women on health and hygiene issues primarily in an effort to combat the high rate of infant mortality in the district.<sup>91</sup>

While concern for the condition of women and children dominated Bryce’s agenda, in his estimation it was men’s struggle with unemployment and low wages that gave rise to many of the most destructive tendencies and moral harms within the family. Speaking before the Ontario Commission on Unemployment in May 1915, Bryce argued that the “grim spectre” of unemployment and the economic problems associated with immigration—among which he cited the reduction of skilled men to unskilled labouring status as the most serious—were responsible for introducing “moral and spiritual evils” into the district.<sup>92</sup> Yet according to Bryce, the example of Earls court offered “concrete evidence of the adaptability of the Englishman if given guidance and opportunity and the helping hand in the first two years of his residency in Canada.”<sup>93</sup> This support included cooperative schemes and other forms of direct economic assistance. But men’s involvement in church clubs was also a critical aspect of this outreach, since it provided alternatives to other forms of masculine sociability, such as fraternal societies, taverns, and sports, which held the potential to divert men’s attention from their family responsibilities and place an unnecessary burden on the family’s income.

Men’s church activity at Earls court thus combined religious practice with a range of masculine-exclusive activities aimed at promoting piety, personal and familial respectability, and a commitment to sobriety and community service. Regular religious observance and attendance at Bible classes were the foundation of men’s involvement. Yet if men shunned these activities the church offered programs, such as the Men’s Own Brotherhood, which mimicked more familiar aspects of masculine secular culture. Similar to many fraternal associations, the Men’s Own offered sociability, entertainment and recreation, mutual aid, raised funds for various purposes, and enjoyed international links.<sup>94</sup> At Earls court, the Men’s Own boasted at its height in September 1914 some 310 members and an average attendance of between 140 and 200 men per Sunday. For a time, it raised sums comparable to the women’s organizations.<sup>95</sup> A major draw for the Men’s

<sup>90</sup> *Star*, October 1, 1914, p. 15; *Star*, March 2, 1917, p. 19; *Christian Guardian*, November 20, 1912, p. 8; and UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Christian Guardian*, November 20, 1912, p. 8; and Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, pp. 127-130.

<sup>92</sup> Ontario, *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment. Pt. IV – Evidence Taken Before the Commission* (Toronto: A.T. Wilgress, 1916), pp. 208-209.

<sup>93</sup> Ontario, *Report*, p. 208.

<sup>94</sup> UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8; and *Star*, April 13, 1914, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board of the Earls court Methodist Church, F 1793, Box 7, file 4, pp. 48, 56; UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8; and *Star*, April 28, 1914, p. 13.

Own was its orchestra. As a former Earls court resident recalled: "They had an orchestra of about 30 pieces. My dad, being a drummer, played with the orchestra and the church would be filled up to the last chair with men."<sup>96</sup> The Men's Own flourished in the prewar period but waned after 1914.<sup>97</sup>

Bryce was able to exert influence over the Men's Own through its lecture series, which he designed to expose working men to issues of moral, social, and political importance. Invited speakers included municipal politicians, representatives of major firms, and prominent local clergy.<sup>98</sup> The Men's Own hosted lectures on topical issues and patriotic themes, often with an emphasis on the relations of labour and capital. In 1914, for example, the Reverend James Buchanan spoke to the Men's Own on educational problems and labour issues, advising the group "to do more thinking if they wished to better their condition." Buchanan emphasized "the value of the home life," which he argued "should be sweet, pure and clean, for out of the home life arose the problems of capital and labour."<sup>99</sup> In the postwar period, lectures explored questions of reconstruction. As secretary to the Social Reconstruction committee of the Methodist Church's Department of Social Services and Evangelism (DSSE) in 1917, Bryce was intimately concerned with this issue. In a report to the DSSE he wrote that "labor should have the fullest freedom to organize. The minimum wage should be sufficient to maintain a family in efficiency." At the same time, he argued that in the interest of ensuring stability of employment in the postwar period the government had a duty "to encourage conciliation between employer and employee."<sup>100</sup> The topics covered in the Men's Own lecture reflected this moderate position. In March 1919, for example, Daniel Strachan, a former preacher and the director of the industrial welfare department of Imperial Oil, spoke on the eight-hour day "as a solution to all the present unrest."<sup>101</sup> As H. M. Grant has shown, although Strachan's public pronouncements emphasized that the company did not wish to "defeat any [labour] organization," this corporate program was in fact a carefully veiled welfare strategy aimed at curtailing unionization at Imperial Oil's refineries.<sup>102</sup> If Bryce was critical of efforts to limit labour organization along these lines he was no doubt amenable to the promise of labour peace, which he believed was essential to the efficient functioning of the working-class family.

While adult associations focused on addressing critical problems in the here-and-now, which might eventually open the way for a life of religious commitment and community service, the prescriptions for civic Christianity were more pronounced in the church's approach to young people. This agenda combined education and recreation with an associational culture aimed at redirecting young

<sup>96</sup> Interview with W. A. Kimber, Bailey, ed., *Stories of York*, p. 79.

<sup>97</sup> UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 4, 48, 78; *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8; cf. Turkstra, "Working-class Churches," p. 488.

<sup>98</sup> AO, Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary—Rev. P. Bryce, RG 8-5, temporary box 302.

<sup>99</sup> *Star*, September 18, 1914, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Department of Social Service and Evangelism, *Industrial Regeneration and Social Reconstruction: Annual Report* (Toronto: Department of Social Service and Evangelism, 1917-18), p. 30.

<sup>101</sup> *Star*, March 19, 1919, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> H. M. Grant, "Solving the Labour Problem at Imperial Oil: Welfare Capitalism in the Canadian Petroleum Industry, 1919-1929," *Labour/Le Travail*, no. 41 (Spring 1998): pp. 69-95.



people through the church’s associational life, away from unsupervised secular pursuits. As early as infancy children were registered on the Cradle Roll and later advanced through a religious education program starting with the primary then the Sunday school, the latter becoming enormously popular and well attended.<sup>103</sup> Recreational programs were a significant component of the church’s outreach to children, whether through athletics, use of the library and playground on the church lot, or holding regular “lantern shows” depicting Bible stories in the church basement.<sup>104</sup> Groups such as the Band of Hope, which advocated abstinence from alcohol and avoidance of tobacco, as well as various athletic clubs were designed to “train” boys in “action and habit” to be good Christian citizens and to attract them to the church, whence they could be streamed into more formalized church structures such as the Sunday school.<sup>105</sup> Girls appear to have represented less of a concern than boys. Evidence of their involvement at Earls court Methodist is unfortunately lacking; scarce explicit mention is made of girls’ participation in the church’s sport and recreational pastimes, for instance, but a few sources indicate that the church placed importance on training girls for future roles as mothers and domestic managers.<sup>106</sup> Lack of concern for girls’ involvement quite possibly reflected a greater tendency for girls, along with their mothers, to attend church and become members.<sup>107</sup>

To be sure, youth involvement strongly reflected gendered concerns, in particular the tendency for young men to venture away from the church as they came of age. Youth took part in a variety of pursuits at the church, notably the Epworth Leagues and young women’s and men’s Bible classes. The Leagues, which included junior, intermediate, and senior levels, involved the participation of females and males in a variety of supervised activities intended to foster wholesome heterosocial mixing while sustaining and promoting church membership, continued attendance, and active participation. League members were often expected to assist with running Sunday school classes and were particularly effective in raising funds, helping at various times to collect money for new hymnbooks and coal for the church stove.<sup>108</sup> The Leagues were popular among junior and intermediate ages, but participation diminished as young people became more active in the labour market. In 1912, organizers reported that the Junior League was a “promising organization with a good attendance” while the Senior League “had been somewhat disorganized and consequently meeting irregular [*sic*].”<sup>109</sup> This appears to have been the case with the Bible classes as well.<sup>110</sup>

103 TPL, *Days Should Speak*, pp. 6, 16; and UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8.

104 TPL, Local History Files, Churches, “Brief History of Earls court United Church, 1905-1950,” p. 4.

105 UCA, Bryce, “History of Earls court United Church,” p. 1; see also Department of Social Service and Evangelism, “Child Welfare and the Family,” in *Christianization of Canadian Life*, p. 19.

106 UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8; and UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, p. 26.

107 Cf. Turkstra, “Working-class Churches,” pp. 469-474.

108 UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 8, 21, 23, 55.

109 UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, p. 38.

110 UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 22, 26, 38, 57, 75.

This elaborate associational culture provided a strong basis from which Earls court Methodist addressed the dynamism and turmoil associated with extensive immigration, social isolation, and war. These were complex issues challenging the church's role in society that had become problematic for other immigrant churches, notably Woodsworth's All Peoples. As Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have noted, the All People's program was an ambivalent one. It combined Woodsworth's major concern for assimilating and "Canadianizing" eastern European immigrants to "Christian citizenship" with an emphasis on offering an "evangelistic message" favoured by Woodsworth's associates, which found the most receptive audience among British Methodist immigrants.<sup>111</sup> At Earls court, the prevalence of British immigrants meant that a Canadianization agenda was less critical, since, in addition to promoting Protestant Christianity, Canadianization essentially entailed acquainting immigrants with British modes of governance and the English language. In its place, Bryce promoted a brand of civic Christianity which linked individual spiritual development to a service and community building ethos.<sup>112</sup>

To further such ends, Bryce made effective use of the Christian associational culture he had built up since the earliest mission days. But in addition, he encouraged wider neighbourhood solidarities that made use of the shared experience of immigration. Church-sponsored British-themed concerts and lectures, for example, allowed local residents to use the church for gatherings celebrating regional origins. As one congregant recalled, the church held reunions for local people from London, Northumberland, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Newfoundland.<sup>113</sup> Addressing pervasive economic struggles was another important feature of the church's outreach meant to foster solidarity in a sea of individualist capitalism. Building on a sense of shared experience and purpose the church introduced cooperative buying programs for the bulk purchase of food, clothing, home appliances, and fuel at wholesale prices. These were open to the entire neighbourhood regardless of denominational affiliation.<sup>114</sup> Such programs were especially helpful during the short but severe recessions of 1907-1908 and 1913-1915, particularly during the difficult first winter of the war when nonessential industries had closed and patriotic funds were not yet fully operational.<sup>115</sup> Lastly, Bryce's efforts in championing various causes dear to the hearts of local residents, such as the desperate need for infrastructure, including sewers, a fire hall, school improvements, and better roads, also helped promote the idea of the church as an institution at the centre of community life, all the while raising Bryce's stature as a community builder.<sup>116</sup>

111 Christie and Gauvreau, *Christian Churches*, pp. 100-101.

112 Christie, "Civic Christianity," pp. 79-105.

113 UCA, *Earls court Methodist Churches*, p. 8; *Star*, April 13, 1914, p. 7; *Star*, April 20, 1914, p. 7; *Star* October 31, 1914, p. 12; see also TPL, "Brief History of Earls court United Church," p. 4.

114 *Star Weekly*, June 3, 1911, p. 7.

115 UCA, Peter Bryce Papers, "History of Earls court United Church" (c. 1940), Accession no. 89.021C, File 126, p. 1; see also Lewis, "Earls court," p. 62.

116 Lewis, "Earls court," p. 105.

This notion of the church as a neighbourhood hub and its pastor as a community organizer was especially marked during the war. While the church devoted considerable time and energy to provisioning soldiers with packages and other comforts, much effort was given to supporting local families and returned soldiers. The Ladies’ Aid Society, the largest lay association at the church, carried out local canvassing work and served the Patriotic Fund, as well as preparing soldiers’ boxes to be sent overseas.<sup>117</sup> For his part, Bryce assumed a leadership role providing comfort and support to soldiers’ families and the hard-pressed community more broadly. He kept a careful tab on enlistments and casualties, estimating in 1917 that 1,850 local men had joined the army and that 14% of those had become casualties, including approximately 80 killed.<sup>118</sup> After the war the church held regular suppers and entertainments for groups of as many as fifty returned men and their wives. During these events, Bryce personally congratulated the men for their “magnificent service” and reminded them “of the heroism of their wives who faced the home responsibilities while [the men] were away.”<sup>119</sup> While a good deal of patriotic rhetoric accompanied the church’s support for the war effort, no evidence suggests that Bryce used the pulpit to encourage recruitment, as had a number of Methodist ministers.<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, religious recruiting did take place locally at the Royal George Theatre, where, in March 1917, a Reverend S. Boal implored those present to not shirk their duty and to help “defend Christianity” and “fight the Hun.”<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

Bryce’s tenure at Earls court lasted from 1906 to 1919, when he left to pursue a variety of projects in the field of social service, including a stint as chair of the Mothers’ Allowances Commission. He later assumed a leadership role in the United Church, which absorbed most Canadian Methodists in 1925,<sup>122</sup> serving a term as the church’s Moderator and spending the duration of his working life as pastor of Toronto’s Metropolitan United Church. It was a distinguished career many progressive clergy would have envied. An editorial obituary in the *Globe and Mail* described Bryce as having lived a “saintly life of almost incredible achievement.”<sup>123</sup> Near the end of his career, Bryce reflected on his long-ago tenure at Earls court as a crucial formative period. “The people of Earls court taught me many things in kindlier human relationships,” he wrote in 1946, “and they set my feet in the pathway to humanitarian legislation, to social reform, and to many avenues of community service.” These experiences, Bryce concluded with characteristic plainness, confirmed for him that Christianity was “a great

<sup>117</sup> UCA, Minutes of the Quarterly Board, pp. 45, 49, 85, 94, 94, 97, 98; Penny Bedal and Ross Bartlett, “The Women Do Not Speak: The Methodist Ladies’ Aid Societies and World War I,” *Canadian Methodist Historical Society, Papers* 10 (1995), pp. 63-86.

<sup>118</sup> *Star* 10 March 1917, p. 11.

<sup>119</sup> *Star*, 8 June 1919, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> J. M. Bliss, “The Methodist Church and World War I,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 49, no. 3 (September 1968): p. 217.

<sup>121</sup> *Star*, March 12, 1917, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> See Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*.

<sup>123</sup> *Globe & Mail*, December 1, 1950, p. 6.

fact in human life” and one that “really works.”<sup>124</sup> This was a type of Christian pragmatism, rooted in what Bryce deemed the fundamental reality of the Christian message, which he believed remained well suited to the modern scientific and industrialized world, if systematically applied.

His success in organizing the Earls court community around the institutional church model was notable for the simplicity of its program and the blueprint it provided for expanding urban and suburban centres—an adaptable, mainstream approach that proved amenable not only to immigrant working people but also to the Methodist Church and later United Church as they grappled with profound changes in industrial society and the powerful influence of secular culture.<sup>125</sup> To that end, Bryce’s model of liberal Protestantism mediated competing agendas within social Christianity by providing scope for traditional religious worship and practice as well as for the reformist priorities of Christian sociology. His repeated emphasis on “efficiency,” which drew on theological innovation and reflected developments in professional management during the first two decades of the century, sought practical solutions not only for the destructive impact of modern capitalism on the traditional structures of social life but also for overcoming the barriers organized churches faced in reaching working people. Refashioning the Christian individual and family for the modern world was therefore the crucial function of the modern church, and from this starting point Bryce envisioned wider “national efficiencies.”<sup>126</sup> In developing a program that emphasized the linkages between individuals and the social purpose of Christian religion Bryce pursued a moderate path. While drawing inspiration from the latest in theological and sociological thought, his position was nonetheless ensconced in a solid evangelical foundation of individualism that he believed evoked Wesley’s own vision of the individual in society. Such was the appeal of this philosophy that Bryce’s appointment as Moderator of the United Church in 1943 was very much contingent on his reputation as a temperate advocate of social Christianity at a time when the church was engrossed in debates over establishing a “shared faith” and how best to meet the challenges of the postwar world.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> *Star*, February 7, 1946, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> Airhart, *Church with the Soul of a Nation*, pp. 102-125; Ian Manson, “Religious Revival and Social Transformation: George Pidgeon and the United Church of Canada in the 1930s,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, vol. 12, no. 2 (September 1996): pp. 213-222.

<sup>126</sup> Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, p. 81.

<sup>127</sup> Airhart, *Church with the Soul of a Nation*, pp. 126-143; Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, pp. 228-248.